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Ricoeur and the Girls

On the Playful Presentation of Being a Girl in a Threatening World and Ricoeur's Paradigm of Reading

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ABSTRACT Schoolgirls writing short stories have surrendered themselves to some rules of a game, which, according to Ricoeur and Gadamer, delimits a field where everything 'is played', and thereby, 'shatters the seriousness' of 'the self-presence of a subject'. This article proposes that this field has a serious side of its own that reveals something true about the everyday reality of being a girl. The proposed worlds in the girls' short stories are places from which research on women's lives should begin is a central argument, along with the contention that for the researcher to be able to take the seriousness of this playful writing into account, she also has to assume the position of a playful figure. The article suggests that the empirical data of schoolgirl writing invited the researcher to *think* Ricoeur and feminist epistemology together. Further, a suggestion is that the roles of reading given by the texts have consequences for a 'new' process-oriented writing pedagogy and the teacher of writing as well.

KEY WORDS feminist epistemology ♦ hermeneutics ♦ incest ♦ play ♦ schoolgirl writing ♦ short story ♦ violence ♦ writing pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

The French philosopher and hermeneutician Paul Ricoeur has pointed to the relation between play and the presentation of a world in works of literary authors and works of art (Ricoeur, 1994: 186). By using the hermeneutician Hans-George Gadamer's conception of play, he highlights that play has its own way of being, and is an experience that transforms those who participate in it. Ricoeur's aim is to use the analysis of play to clarify the act of reading.¹ To approach writing as analogous to

play, and to use Gadamer's conceptions of play as a point of departure, also proves useful.

I ask what use we might make of Ricoeur in research on schoolgirl writing. Furthermore, I propose that in the study of schoolgirl writing it is possible to juxtapose Ricoeur with the feminist philosopher Sandra Harding, who asks the researcher to start 'thinking from women's lives' (Harding, 1991). The article has a theoretical purpose *to think* hermeneutics and a feminist standpoint *together*. According to Ricoeur, the researcher should start thinking from the text, or her collection of written data.

The girls and written data from the classroom were my starting point, and that which brought me to – or demanded – Ricoeur (1991).² My point of departure is the playful presentation of worlds in short stories written by girls in a Norwegian high school class in the 1990s. To give an indication of themes that seem to occupy 16-year-old Norwegian schoolgirls and the context in which the stories were written: themes like incest, rape and violence predominate in a huge part of my dataset of short stories.³ The bulk were written in exam-like school situations (called *tentamen* in Norway) where the writers worked in isolation, and were given assignments that did not directly invite them to write about such themes. Actually, I had expected quite different themes to appear (Engdal Halse, 1993a, 2000; Engdal Halse, forthcoming).

SCHOOLGIRL WRITING: A MODE OF PLAY AND A MODE OF BEING

As solitary writers, the schoolgirls in my material give playful presentations of worlds, where nothing is serious or real, and where the writer may forget or transform both herself and her partners in real life. These girls have submitted themselves to the seriousness of presenting worlds. As Ricoeur advances, referring to Gadamer's conception of presentation (*Darstellung*), play follows a dialectic between 'a serious side of its own' or the presentation of a world, and the play. 'Everyday reality is abolished and yet everyone becomes himself', Ricoeur (1994: 187) contends.⁴ If fiction writing is an analogy to play, we may also say that it has the character of what Gadamer calls a 'metamorphosis' (*Verwandlung*), that is, both 'an imaginary transposition marked by the reign of figures' (*Gebilde*), and, according to Ricoeur, 'the transformation of everything into its true being' (Ricoeur, 1994: 187).

All play reveals something true, Ricoeur affirms – by pointing to Gadamer – and worlds in fiction are 'proposed in the mode of play'. My hypothesis is that it is also because of the playfulness of fiction writing that the girls' short stories in my example open us up as readers to worlds

where each has a seriousness 'of its own'. I propose that what has taken place in each schoolgirl's process of writing short stories is a 'metamorphosis' – both an imaginary transformation and a transformation of experience into 'its true being'. The player or writer is also 'metamorphosed' in playful presentation. I suggest that we may use these short stories as points of departure, to speak of what Ricoeur (1994: 148) labels a 'suspension of reference'. The reference to the text in Ricoeur's conception is the projection of a world that the text discloses 'in front of' itself, as a future horizon of possible existence, so to speak. As I explain, I have read the presentation of worlds in the girls' short stories as a possible mode of having been a girl and becoming a woman.

Ricoeur's Conception of a Possible World and the Girls' Projection of Worlds

Ricoeur maintains that to speak of 'a world of the text' is to stress the feature belonging to every literary work of 'opening before it a horizon of possible experience, a world in which it would be possible to live' (Ricoeur, 1991: 26). The world in Ricoeur's conception is also unsettled, and a world to strive or hope for. Moreover, this world exists only in relation to the reader. As far as Ricoeur is concerned, there is a 'being-in-a-world' that displays itself to the reader,⁵ and a revelatory power of the literary work. The world the literary text opens up for us is, in other words, a world 'the reader could wish to live in', as a kind of 'life-world' different from her own.

Reading and interpretation in Ricoeur's notion has an existential character through the act of appropriation (from German *Aneignung*).⁶ Ricoeur affirms that *aneignen* means 'to make one's own what was initially alien' (Ricoeur, 1994: 185). Reading – and as Ricoeur puts forward, 'to understand' – is in other words not to project oneself into the text, it is 'to receive an enlarged self from the apprehension of proposed worlds' (Ricoeur, 1994: 182). Ricoeur's notion of the reader's 'appropriation of the world of the text' at the same time also means possibilities for the reader to develop a new self, freed from the actual self in the real world.

My proposal is that Ricoeur's analysis of literary works (written by outstanding male authors) can be applied to my schoolgirls' short stories, despite – or maybe even because of – my texts opening up worlds that differ from those in Ricoeur's material, worlds related to the existence of being a girl, and becoming a woman. I propose that the writers in my material are – for the time being – 'freed from their actual self'. At the same time, I conclude that my material of 'proposed worlds' renders few possibilities for developing a new self, and a world women would wish to live in. Ricoeur's vision of possible worlds, which is also quite optimistic on behalf of our 'being' in the world, and our possibilities of constructing

a self, might be said to be turned upside down or even ripped to pieces by these young fiction writers in the classroom.⁷ What I suggest is that schoolgirls' short stories give evidence of modes of being – or (if we prefer Wittgenstein to Heidegger) 'forms of life' – modes or forms that contribute to our understanding of the meaning of being a girl.

An Exposed Position of Vulnerability – A Collective Experience of Being a Girl

Regarding the possible existence of what the literary work offers the reader, a new world or a future horizon – or the reality in question (that which Ricoeur labels 'what is') – Ricoeur has also said that it is 'something which comprises a future horizon of *undecided* possibilities, something *to fear* or *to hope for*' (Ricoeur, 1994: 187; my emphasis). Here Ricoeur also points to an indecisiveness and includes 'fear' when he speaks about the future horizon. To be honest, this was something I only recognized *after* I had analysed my data and concluded how the worlds in my material comprised horizons of fear, in contradiction to the projection of possible worlds in the literary works of art Ricoeur had as his point of departure, and in which the reader would wish to live. In other words, Ricoeur proved even more applicable to my empirical collection of threatening worlds than I had initially expected after my first encounter with his conception of possible worlds.

As I have elaborated, a relatively large number of the girls' short stories in my material open up threatening worlds nobody would wish to live in. Moreover, these worlds present women and girls as vulnerable, in ways that suppress the self. The conclusion of my first reading of the texts was that the girls' short stories document how narrative fiction writing allows the writer to explore how the identity of having been a girl and becoming a woman represents a vulnerability: an exposed position of violence, rape and incest.⁸ At the same time, I concluded that the girls became informants about fundamental experiences, without (necessarily) writing about their own individual lives or something they had really experienced – maybe because they had *not* been doing precisely that.

My first hypothesis was that the stories told were different from the individual writer's own life story, in the sense that the short stories (re)presented something the writers *might* have experienced, and something that might have happened, and could still happen. The projection of something that may still happen, as a possible experience – that these short stories, to use Ricoeur's concepts, 'disclose in front of' themselves – also enabled me to speak of a 'suspension of reference', or of the text as the projection of a world. I suggest that the ensemble of references opened up by these texts may be characterized as possible modes of being.

There was, however, an aspect of these texts' horizons of possible

experience, that seemed to be outside Ricoeur's mediation of a possible horizon, and that was the projection of worlds the texts opened *behind* them, so to speak, as a possible experience of what might have happened in the past. In this sense the reference of the text as a projection of a world was not a reference of suspension, but rather a reference to memory, and, as I suggest, a reference to a collective and embodied memory of fear.⁹ My proposal is also that this fear is difficult to comprehend directly as an experience, but it can be approached through texts and – as in my example – through the girls' short stories in which these experiences are expressed. This embodied memory may also entail a subconsciousness that is only traceable in language and text (Engdal Halse, 1993a: 60; Matthis, 1993). I also suggest that the experiences of having been a girl that these short stories give access to might be understood as the embodied lived experiences which girls and women share, and as a collective memory of possible experiences.¹⁰ In other words, I propose that the girls' short stories might be approached as an 'archive' of collective memory, and that these memories can also be characterized as a horizon of possible experience, or as embodied fears.¹¹ We may also speak of this horizon as a past horizon of possible experience.

A Twofold Disclosure of a Threatening World – A Preliminary Conclusion

In my material of girls' short stories, I attempt to speak of a twofold disclosure of horizons of fear, or of fear as a possible experience, of having been a girl and becoming a woman. I also propose that the worlds in my empirical collection comprise both future and past horizons of fear. Besides, the projection of becoming a woman in a threatening world, as a future horizon that the texts open in front of them, is anchored in a fundamental fear. In other words, this fear has its root in the threatening world of having been a girl, which the texts open behind them, so to speak, and that is what I label a past horizon of possible experience. To make it plain, through the twofold projection of possible worlds in the girls' short stories, we cannot only speak of a suspension of reference as a projection of becoming a woman, but also of a reference to the memory of having been a girl. Moreover, this memory, I assert, is not of an individual kind, in the sense that it is something that has happened to the writer, but something that *might* have happened, and *may* still happen, to the writer. In other words: when it comes to the question of whose experiences my writers express through their short stories, I suggest that it is the collective and embodied experiences of fear women are sharing.

Through detailed descriptions of girls and women's 'life-worlds', and through use of metaphors and portrayal of characters, intrigues and plot, I contend that these short story writers say something fundamental about

women's condition in our culture. Playful presentations of a threatening world have transformed experience into 'its true being'. Because of the author's freedom to disguise herself – in Bakhtin's (1981) words 'to speak with others' voices in his own voice' – and because of the writer's freedom in relation to real people and events in her own life story, I maintain that my authors were given the chance to write about the collective and fundamental experiences of having been a girl, and becoming a woman, that women in our culture share. Through their short story writing, the girls have been given an opportunity to handle – for one moment in time – their threatened existence as well. Furthermore, we might claim by paraphrasing Ricoeur that the individual writer has been making 'her own' what was 'initially alien', and that through this process she manages to understand both the other and her self better.

The Father as Molester – And the Ditch of Autobiography

My analysis of the short stories of pupils has raised the question whether these texts, some of them written in the first person singular, invite the reader to identify the 'I' or one of the other characters and the author as being one and the same. At the same time, readers who launched such questions stated that the texts 'are about' everyday reality, and that 'my authors' were telling stories about themselves, and for example about their own fathers or relatives as molesters. Because of this, critics argued that as a researcher, I had compromised my pupils.¹² From my perspective, this is not a question of ethics. Rather, it resurrects an old debate within literary criticism, about the relationship between an author and the characters in her or his novel. It also reveals a certain attitude to the texts of pupils. Even if we let pupils write fiction, we, as well as both teachers and researchers, seem to have a problem taking them seriously as playful writers, who, as I contended at the start of this article, make self-presence enigmatic.

My material is a far cry from novels, and my writers are not professional authors of short stories either. However, I contend that my short story authors are participants in the playful presentation of worlds. They thus find solutions in, for example, disguising themselves, hiding behind different characters, taking different points of view and changing positions, just like professional authors. We also have to recognize the authors of my material as 'playful figures'. And, as Ricoeur affirms, 'it makes little difference, therefore, whether a text is written in third or in first person. In every case, the distanciation is the same and the variety of solutions proves that we have not gone beyond rule-governed play' (Ricoeur, 1994: 189).

The Experience of Evil – And the Steps of Reading and Distanciation

As I contended in my introduction, the girls' texts brought me to Ricoeur's theory of possible worlds, just as – as I discuss next – they brought me to his request to the reader to become a playful figure. My empirical data of schoolgirls' short stories laid the premise for a theory I could make use of, not vice versa. By taking another perspective enhanced by Ricoeur into account, we can read the presentations of worlds in my material as the girls' experiences of evil in our western – or perhaps more specifically, Scandinavian – culture.¹³

The movement in my analysis of threatening worlds can be considered as stepping away from a naive reading – or an art of guessing – and an attempt to ignore both myself and theory, towards an understanding based on my theoretical reading, through different kinds of readings and analyses. As a starting point, I, as a researcher and reader, might be in a position of distanciation and free from my actual self in a real world. The playful worlds of molestation and violence differ from my own individual life story. I was not a researcher who as a result of her own unfortunate childhood considered it her task to make sexual abuse the object of her study. My material of short stories was written by teenagers in a Norwegian high school in the 1990s, and the writers were growing up in a period of time when everyday life differed in many ways from the situation I had experienced in the 1960s. However, it was my colleagues' *misreading* of my empirical collection of texts that made me summon Ricoeur's conception of distanciation and his notion of the birth of the text (Ricoeur, 1994: 145).

THE RESEARCHER AS A PLAYFUL FIGURE: THE BIRTH OF THE TEXT AND THE ROLES OF READING

The text, Ricoeur claims, divides the act of writing and the act of reading into two sides, between which there is no communication (Ricoeur, 1994: 146). The absence of dialogue between the writer and the reader places writing 'in the site of speech' (Ricoeur, 1994: 147). The text 'signifies *here* and *now*', as an *event* or an instance of discourse when the text *finds* a reader (Ricoeur, 1994: 159). In addition, this reader in Ricoeur's conception is 'anyone who can read' (Ricoeur, 1994: 185).¹⁴ The reader has to attempt the type of reading that leaves her or him, for the time being, in the suspense of the text, or in a situation of 'prolonging the suspense concerning the referential relation to the world and to the speaking subject' (Ricoeur, 1994: 153). As Ricoeur puts it, the suspense deferring the reference: 'merely leaves the text, as it were, "in the air", outside or without a world' (Ricoeur, 1994: 148).

It is, in other words, the emancipation of writing from dialogue, and the dialogic situation in a world, that, according to Ricoeur, constitutes 'the birth of the text' (Ricoeur, 1994: 145). Ricoeur treats the reader as a playful figure, given a role by the text to participate in its universe. This is a double 'metamorphosis' of the author and the reader. He says: 'Assuming the role of the reader corresponds to the mysterious metamorphosis which the audience undergoes in the theatre when the lights go out and the curtains are drawn' (Ricoeur, 1994: 190).¹⁵

In what ways is it possible (and I assert that it *is* possible) to transfer the reader as a playful figure to the researcher's reading of her data? I question how Ricoeur's hermeneutics challenge a writing pedagogy that views as core the dialogue between the writer and the reader in a situation in a world, and a feminist position that requests the researcher to take not just that into account, but the researcher's own lived experiences as well.

In Ricoeur's notion dialogue is *interrupted* by the text, not cut off, and the referential movement is *intercepted*, not suppressed (Ricoeur, 1994: 148).¹⁶ Reading is possible because the text is not 'closed in on itself, but opens out onto other things' (Ricoeur, 1994: 158). He contends that the referential movement is always towards the world of the reader. It is the reader's task to bring the text back to the real world, or down to earth so to speak, and to 'conjoin a new discourse to the discourse of the text' (Ricoeur, 1994: 158).

A New Writing Pedagogy – The Writing Pupil Calling for a Dialogue-Partner

Ricoeur's notion of the world-less text no doubt appears as incompatible with what has been described as a new, process-oriented writing pedagogy.¹⁷ It could equally be said that, from the perspective of the everyday practice in the classroom, this pedagogy, through a new practice letting the reader participate as a dialogue-partner in the process of writing, challenges Ricoeur's conception of 'the reader's absence from the act of writing, and the writer's absence from the act of reading' (Ricoeur, 1994: 147). Thus, we might assert by paraphrasing Ricoeur, that the text has been interrupted *by dialogue*.

Process-oriented pedagogy is characterized by the esteem of the pupil's text, and by helping both the writer and the text forward (Engdal Halse, 1989, 1991; Hoel, 1995). The core or *cynosure* is also the writing process, in which the author displays her different drafts in her response group (Hoel, 1995).¹⁸ What I felt had been lost, in what has been referred to – by the actors – as a paradigm shift within writing education in Norway towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s (Evensen et al., 1991) – was the acknowledgement that by 'the birth of the text', the face-to-face dialogue between the writer and the reader, even in the

classroom, is inevitably interrupted *by the text* (Engdal Halse, 1989, 1991). The author is distanced by her own text and should take the consequences, not only in appearing as, using Ricoeur's vocabulary, 'the first reader' (Ricoeur, 1994: 149), but in participating as a co-reader of her own text, in her response group.

*The Role Given by the Text – Or What Happens When Words Become Like Birds?*¹⁹

I have highlighted elsewhere that not only the writer, but also the text, call for a dialogue-partner (Engdal Halse, 1989). I have suggested that both writers and readers in the classroom should attempt to place writing in 'the site of speech' (Ricoeur, 1994: 147), and assume the position of listener. Ricoeur requested the reader to assume the position of a listener who is asking the text what it says (Ricoeur, 1994: 201). I have suggested that the teacher in the classroom should also ask what the text had on its mind or 'in its heart' (Engdal Halse, 1989). I have maintained that this way of viewing pupils' texts, like birds 'in the air' – taking off from any dialogical and pedagogical situation – has potential for the writer as well: to see her or his own text from another perspective, and in new ways. The role given by the text should also be indicative of the direction of reading. This also implies that 'the actualised text' (Ricoeur, 1994: 159) finds a reader who is ready to enter the role designated for her or him. If we were to take Ricoeur literally, and use my empirical material as an example, we might put it like this: playful discourse laid the premise for the researcher's role of reading these worlds, eclipsing the writer's individual life story, and viewing texts like birds that have taken off from the situation of the classroom where the pupils work.

The Enigmatic Text Calling for a Dialogue-Partner – Or to Draw the Curtains and Hand Oneself Over

An enigmatic and thoughtful text calls for interpretation, but not by returning to the supposed intention of the author. Ricoeur emphasizes that if we can speak of an intention, it is that of the text (Ricoeur, 1994: 161). The text appears to be an active text or dialogue-partner that finds its reader, independently of its author, and tries to bring the reader on track. To interpret is to place oneself en route, and to 'follow the path of thought opened by the text' (Ricoeur, 1994: 148). Does that not imply that the researcher too should expose herself to the text, to see where it will take her? Perhaps the crucial point is a fear of reading our data in ways that imply this kind of self-exposure to the text; a fear of letting the text carry us away or of stating the premise for the perspectives we should pursue and what theory we should apply. The insistence that the text, for the time

being, has no outside, or no world or speaking subject that can be pointed to, also implies that the researcher, I argue, has to 'situate herself in the "place of the text" and in the "closure" of this place' (Ricoeur, 1994: 153).

This kind of participative interpretation, and the situatedness in the 'place of the text', that I claim we can find in Ricoeur's conception, challenges the researcher to assume the position of a playful figure who must venture to 'let go' – to gain admittance to a new space of meaning. What the researcher should learn from the teacher as an insider, is her *interest* in trying to take the pupil's perspective. To take the pupil's perspective does not, necessarily, mean taking what they are telling us at face value, nor does it mean reading their writing and hoping to trace the author's intention. Neither does it mean sharing the teacher's awareness of the situation. To take the pupil's perspective will entail taking Ricoeur's perspective: that understanding is neither to rejoin the author nor to project oneself into the text. Ricoeur challenges the participating interpreter to overlook the speaking subjects and their situation, as well as her own prejudice and real-life situation. Ricoeur's request for the researcher to start thinking from the text also makes it feasible, as I discuss next, to start thinking from the pupil's perspective.

A Feminist Standpoint plus Ricoeur – And Thinking from the Perspective of Girls' Lives

Standpoint theorists have requested researchers to take the perspectives and positions of marginalized and oppressed groups in society. Ricoeur's notion of reading and appropriation, through a process of making 'one's own what was initially alien', might also function as an incitement to struggle against cultural alienation and prejudice, and to take the perspective of the culturally marginalized (Ricoeur, 1994: 185). As standpoint theorists have expounded, it is the *events* of everyday life that should be the objects of our study (Harding, 1991: 119). In Ricoeur's conception, reading is the *event* that causes a position of research. The feminist philosopher Sandra Harding claims that for a position to count as a standpoint, 'we must insist on women's lives as the place from which feminist research should begin' (Harding, 1991: 123). For Harding, it is a question of observations and theory that view the world *from the perspective of women's lives*.²⁰ My proposal is that it should be possible to join Harding's request for a feminist standpoint with Ricoeur's insistence on *the text as the place* from which our research should begin, and that this is a position that should enable us *to think from girls' lives*. My collection of short stories, I suggest, questions whether the personal life story or autobiographical narrative – whether interviews or informants' written texts – is a more reliable archive for human experience than narrative fiction. My question is also: could it not be an alternative to let the informants write

fiction instead of letting them write about their own lives (as many anthropologists do, for example)?

Ricoeur's paradigm of reading, as we have seen, confronts the researcher with assuming the position of a playful figure who should look beyond herself and her situation in order to gain admittance to a new world, or a new space of meaning. This position is evidently in conflict with the notion of 'situated knowledge', and the request for the researcher to take her own lived experiences into account, which Harding (1991) is defending. There is – in other words – an important difference in positioning between Ricoeur and Harding concerning the question of the researcher's situatedness. While Ricoeur's participating interpreter is challenged to draw the curtains and to overlook her situation in the world, Harding challenges the researcher to make her own situation and her own subjectivity a 'situated knowledge' and a part of the world she is going to study; the object of her enquiry (Harding, 1991: 138). What both Ricoeur and Harding are doing, and from quite different critical positions, is to resuscitate the debate on objectivity (and at the same time remain aloof from the positivist concept of objectivity). Ricoeur's request for the researcher is also to abandon herself, in order to gain admittance to 'the text's objective meaning', whereas Harding's conception of a 'strong objectivity', or of a more 'secure knowledge', directs the researcher to make the researching subject – herself – the object of research. Harding is at the same time revisiting the notion of reflexivity by emphasizing that 'the notion of "strong objectivity" conceptualizes the value of putting the subject or agent of knowledge in the same critical, causal plane as the object of her or his inquiry' (Harding, 1991: 161).

*Autobiography and Reflexivity – And the Fear of Conjoining
Conflicting Positions of Reading?*

It was only rather late in the process of research that I saw the significance of my own life story in understanding how the work of young writers constitutes a self (Engdal Halse, 2001a; Engdal Halse, forthcoming). This has contributed to strengthening my conviction, a conviction Ricoeur among others has paved the way for: that we should not be paralysed by a fear of reading from positions that appear to be in conflict. The role of falsification in Ricoeur's (1994) notion is the conflict between competing interpretations. This should entail that we have to bring different interpretations as well as different positions of reading into encounter or in opposition.²¹ Perhaps we also need to remind ourselves that theory written by men might still render new perspectives on data written by women and girls. What I further suggest is that the reflexivity of feminist epistemology (and that Harding presupposes) corresponds to some extent with hermeneutics and reflective philosophy. As Ricoeur contends, the

interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject 'who understands himself better' (Ricoeur, 1994: 158). This culmination Ricoeur prefers to call 'concrete reflection'. In other words, Ricoeur sees at this point a correlation between hermeneutics and (self-)reflective philosophy. In reflective hermeneutics, Ricoeur asserts, 'the constitution of the *self* is contemporaneous with the constitution of *meaning*' (Ricoeur, 1994: 159; emphasis in original). As previously mentioned, however, to attain the kind of self-interpretation Ricoeur requests, the researching subject has for the time being to assume a position of ignoring herself, and enter an *alien world*.

The Structural Analysis and the Art of Guessing – And the Question of Validation

Towards the end of this article, I have challenged the researcher to evoke structural analysis to respect 'the act of the text', as part of the attempt to take pupils' texts seriously. Ricoeur refers to Claude Lévi Strauss and his *Structural Anthropology* to illustrate how the function of structural analysis, as a stage on the way to interpretation, opens us to the *aporias* of human existence, and urges us to 'limit situations, the origin and the end, death, suffering and sexuality' (Ricoeur, 1994: 161). In my work with both the girls' short stories and the novels of the Norwegian author Amalie Skram, I have conjoined A.J. Greimas' actant-model (Greimas, 1974)²² with other approaches, and, for example, psychoanalysis (Engdal Halse, 1982, 1993a, 1993b). I attempt to propose that the conjoining of the structural analysis with my other strategies or positions of reading points towards the existential *aporias* or to the 'limit situations' of being a girl, a receiver and a victim of men's and fathers' lust and violation. Ricoeur says that to explain a narrative is to grasp 'the fleeting structure of interlaced actions' (Ricoeur, 1994: 156). My suggestion is that in order to grasp the entanglement of actions and dramatic events in girls' short stories, the step involving structural analysis might prove significant. As I elaborated on in the first part of this article, we should also remind ourselves that at the same time as the presentations of worlds in the girls' short stories point towards women's life stories in a real world, there is not an obvious relationship between the narratives of violation and the individual writer's life story. The validation by which we test out our guesses is, in Ricoeur's notion, an argumentative procedure, where the text serves as circumstantial evidence. Ricoeur asserts that validation is an argumentative discipline, comparable to judicial procedure. 'It is a logic of uncertainty and of qualitative probability' (Ricoeur, 1994: 212). And it is within the movement from guessing to critical reading that Ricoeur wants us to evoke and make use of the structural analysis, as a paradigm of explanation that also should contribute to the avoidance of subjectivity. In

contrast to the decision of a judge, there is, however, no last word, neither in literary criticism nor in the social sciences.

To Think from the Teacher's Life – And to Submit Oneself to the Game of Writing

Drawing on Ricoeur, I proposed that the researcher should situate herself in *the place of the text*, and that this position gives her a special location for, using Harding's (1991) conception, *thinking from girls' lives*. I elaborated earlier on how Harding's conception of 'thinking from women's lives' and Ricoeur's conception of narrating and critical reading made me launch the concept of 'thinking from the teacher's life' (Engdal Halse, 2001a: 27; Engdal Halse, forthcoming). My point of departure and interest has been playful writers in the classroom, and the encounter with a new writing pedagogy that also gave me – as teacher and researcher – new opportunities to enter into the game of writing.²³ Without having attempted to, or taken the risk of, submitting myself to the game of writing, I propose that the narrative about Mira (me) and her (my) class of short story writing pupils would never have come into being (Engdal Halse, 2001a, 2001b). By telling a story about the teacher Mira (myself), I, as the writing researcher, may be said to have inhabited the position of a playful figure and to have submitted myself to a playful presentation of a world. In my attempts to draw on Ricoeur, I also argue the following. Without his work on narrative and interpretation (Ricoeur, 1991) I would not have been capable of introducing the concept of the researcher as 'another type of narrator' who at the same time is not only a critical reader of documents, but her own reader (Engdal Halse, 2001a, 2001b).

The Playful Presentation of Being a Girl – And the Collective Experiences of Fear

I began this article by saying that Ricoeur's aim to use the metaphor and analysis of play was, primarily, to clarify the position of the reader as a playful figure. Ricoeur's notion of appropriation as the last bridge of the hermeneutic arc conjoins the interpretation of the text with self-interpretation (Ricoeur, 1994: 159). In some way, my approach may be said to have turned Ricoeur's hermeneutics upside down, in the sense that I have paid attention to *the writer's* position as the executor of meaning, and the writer's possibility of constituting a self. I have proposed that it is the writers in my material who received an injunction to self-reflectivity, and that through their playful presentations of worlds they constituted a self as a possible mode of being girls and women. At the same time, I have introduced the constitution of the meaning of being a girl and becoming a woman as being contemporaneous with the writers' constitution of a

possible and unsettled self; as threatening and something to fear; and as both future reality and embodied memory. Perhaps it is possible to turn on Ricoeur and say that the girls in my material created a new ostensive reference, through the execution the act of writing implies. One of my reviewers has stated that girls' 'collective' experience of fear is 'a key new concept that deserves further elaboration and exploration', and a concept that 'adds a new dimension to Ricoeur'. If that is really so, and if feminist research wants to explore girls' experiences and to elaborate concepts and theory from the perspective of their lives, my proposal is that we must insist on girls' writing as, using Harding's vocabulary, 'the place from which feminist research should begin', and restore hermeneutics as a proper discipline.

NOTES

1. I am fully aware there are other theorists who have been using the conception of play related to reading, my purpose in this context, however, is to draw on Ricoeur and Gadamer.
2. I have brought forth how my empirical data of writing and texts demanded Bakhtin in other publications. See for example Engdal Halse (1993a, 2000).
3. I have become aware of feminist work that does make use of Ricoeur in thinking about texts by women, and of incest victims as well, though in ways different from mine, for example Morney (1997).
4. As Ricoeur also contends: 'In play, subjectivity forgets itself; in seriousness, subjectivity is regained' (Ricoeur, 1994: 186).
5. Ricoeur points to how Heidegger's analysis of understanding does not have to do with understanding another person, but a project as 'the outline of a new-being-in-the-world' (Ricoeur, 1991: 192).
6. Ricoeur is also referring to Gadamer's notion of the 'fusion of horizons'. According to Gadamer, the reader belongs at once to the work's horizon of experience in imagination and to her or his own real world, and the horizon of expectation and the horizon of experience continually confront one another and fuse together (Ricoeur, 1991; Gadamer, 1993).
7. My literary critic colleagues may of course at this point argue that because these writers don't master (in Bakhtin's words) 'the image of language', and don't write literary texts that (with Ricoeur) have the ability to open new worlds for the reader, it is also impossible to apply the theoretical concept of possible worlds to girls' short stories.
8. I have elsewhere included Ricoeur's theory on narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1991), as a point of departure for analysing both schoolgirl writing and my own position as a researcher and narrator (Engdal Halse, 2001a, 2001b; Engdal Halse, forthcoming).
9. On the concept of embodiment, see, for example, Grosz (1994).
10. For example, Ricoeur has pointed to the anchorage of narratives in memories (Ricoeur, 1991). See also Engdal Halse (2001a, 2001b, forthcoming).
11. Ricoeur contends that 'writing preserves discourse and makes it an archive available for individual and collective memory' (Ricoeur, 1994: 147).
12. I have encountered such questions and comments on seminars for teachers

- and researchers where I have presented my material of pupils' short stories. One of my colleagues and readers also accused me of compromising my pupils.
13. See, for example, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Ricoeur, 1976), which belongs to a part of Ricoeur's publications I have not yet become acquainted with.
 14. Ricoeur's notion of the text's addressee as an unknown and potential reader, is also in discrepancy with the notion of writing and reading as a dialogic situation or an event, and as addressivity and answer. For example, the Russian literary critic Mikhail M. Bakhtin has highlighted the dialogical character of writing and the significance of addressivity, that writing and our texts are always addressed to someone. I have (in earlier publications) pointed to Bakhtin's conception of event, addressee and the conception of writing as an 'answer', and of the text as a single 'link in the chain of speech communication' (Bakhtin, 1981). See, for example, Engdal Halse (1993a, 2000).
 15. Ricoeur is quoting Wolfgang Kayser 'Qui raconte le roman?' (in *Poétique*, IV, 1970: 510).
 16. It is due to this 'interception' that Ricoeur distances himself from what he labels 'the ideology of the absolute text' (Ricoeur, 1994: 148).
 17. I am referring to the 'new' writing pedagogy brought overseas from the University of California to Norway and Scandinavia in the mid-1980s by the American writing pedagogue and professor Mary K. Healy. I have elsewhere analysed my encounter with Mary K. as an *event* that contributed to changing my life story, so to speak, and my everyday practice as both a teacher and writer. See, for example, Engdal Halse (1992, 1996, forthcoming).
 18. Hoel's subject is response groups in theory and in practice in a Norwegian high school class.
 19. In a lecture on Ricoeur for my master students at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in 2003, I was referring to Ricoeur's notion of the suspension of reference that leaves the text 'in the air', and launched the idea that texts are like birds. Afterwards, one of my students, Petter, sent me a poem by a Norwegian song writer called Ola Bremnes, in which it is said that 'words are like birds'.
 20. It should be added that Harding too is underscoring that 'women's telling of their experiences is not the same thing as thinking from the perspective of women's lives' (Harding, 1991: 150).
 21. In Bakhtin's terminology the notion of assuming a position is derived from the conception of opposition. See Bakhtin (1981) and Engdal Halse (2000). By relying on Bakhtin and his conception of heteroglossia, we might also claim that knowledge is produced in the encounter between conflicting and different positions. See also Engdal Halse (2001a) where, by drawing on Bakhtin, I explicitly discuss this.
 22. Actants are defined by the predicates of action; the actant is the one by whom, to whom, with whom, the action is done; it is the one who promises, who receives the promise, the giver, the receiver, etc. As Ricoeur emphasizes, structural analysis thus brings out a 'hierarchy of actants correlative to the hierarchy of actions' (Ricoeur, 1994: 157).
 23. Here I am thinking of the forms of exploring writing that, for example, my research diary – or logbook – gave access to (Engdal Halse, 1996).

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